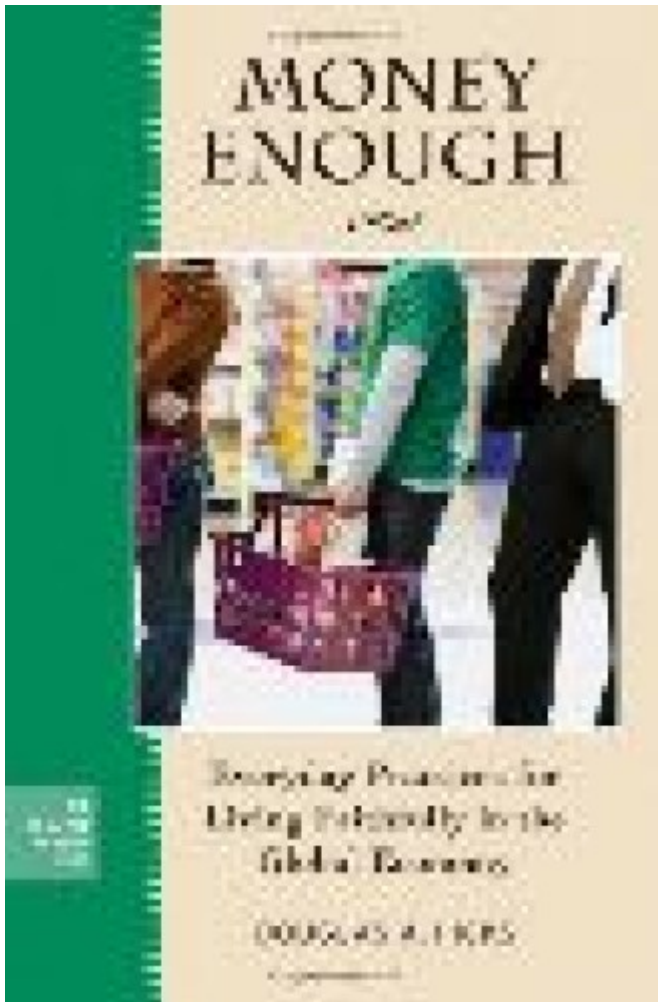


Money Enough/Rediscovering Values

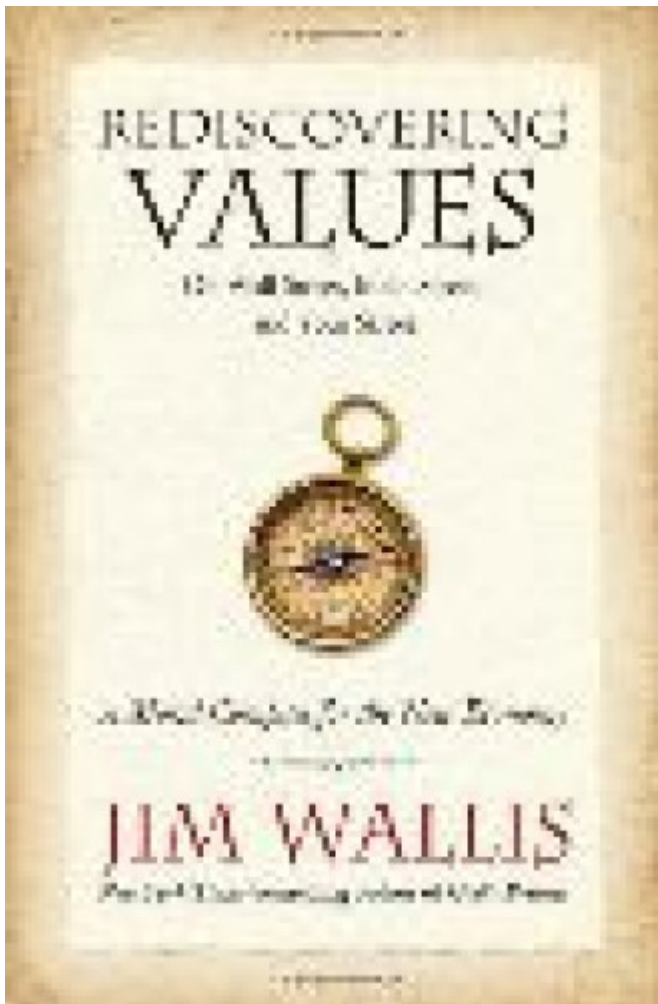
reviewed by [Jonathan Wilson-Hartgrove](#) in the [May 4, 2010](#) issue

In Review



Money Enough: Everyday Practices for Living Faithfully in the Global Economy

Douglas A. Hicks
Jossey-Bass



Rediscovering Values: On Wall Street, Main Street, and Your Street

Jim Wallis
Howard

In 2008, just as the phenomenon that we've come to call the Great Recession was showing up on the cover of the *New York Times*, I asked a friend who lives in a poor neighborhood how the downturn in the economy was affecting his neighbors. "Economic downturn?" he joked. "My neighborhood is recession proof." It was true enough at the time: unemployed renters weren't feeling the heat from foreclosures and a tanking stock market. It's hard to lose a 401(k) if you've never had one. Still, my friend and I both knew that his quip was a case of gallows humor. The rich don't take a hit without the poor feeling it soon enough.

Many of us have long doubted the chief tenet of Reaganomics—that profits will eventually trickle down to the masses. But I’ve watched with a bitter sense of irony as the losses of big business and well-to-do individuals have trickled down to my neighborhood at a breakneck pace in the form of layoffs, cutbacks and reduced budgets for the nonprofits that serve as a safety net around here. The house of hospitality where I live is on the emergency call list for five or six social service organizations that provide housing for homeless folks in our town. They call us when their programs are full and they have nowhere else to send people. For the past year, we’ve gotten a call almost every week.

In times like these, preachers worth their salt are stopping between budget meetings and requests for benevolence to search the scriptures for some good economic news. Two new books promise to help in this quest. The first, *Money Enough*, is from Douglas Hicks, a professor of religion and leadership at the University of Richmond who is also a Presbyterian minister. Having completed his doctoral work at Harvard under the noted theologian Ronald Thiemann and the Nobel Prize-winning economist Amartya Sen, Hicks is the sort of preacher who is well prepared to navigate the complicated terrain of literature in theology, ethics and economics. He does so in a voice that’s refreshingly accessible. Hicks catches readers up on best practices from the field of economics and connects them to the Bible and John Calvin.

Still, Hicks is clear that the lessons of economics do not always line up easily with the teachings of Jesus. The “Christian economic ethic we find in the Bible is focused primarily on an economy based on person-to-person relationships.” So many of the things Jesus said (“Give to whoever asks” comes to mind) seem impractical in a global economy where half the population lives on less than \$2 a day but most of us never spend significant time with people outside our economic class and education bracket.

What are we to do with the particular instructions from Moses and Jesus about how to handle our money? Hicks’s answer is that the witness of scripture as a whole calls us to shift from “econocentrism” to a God-centered view of life that “acknowledges the importance of economic well-being without making it ultimate.” By their very nature, markets do not believe that all people are created equal. They assume instead that every dollar is equal. But a God-centered perspective invites us to see that of God in everyone. The trick is somehow to harness the power of money and leverage our access in the global economy for the sake of people who are

overlooked and excluded.

Hicks admits that this is not easy. In every sphere of our material lives, a shift is needed—from acquisition to development, from the pursuit of happiness to the pursuit of well-being, from breadwinning to stewardship, from wasting time to Sabbath delight. Hicks should be commended for getting practical at both the global and the household level. (The ONE Campaign is good, but so is microlending; simplicity matters, but so does gender justice.) Like healthy eating, economic faithfulness, by Hicks's account, is hard but doable. Every shift is movement in the right direction. We're on a journey. Best to celebrate progress, even if it comes in small steps.

But the nagging question in my mind as I read *Money Enough* was why the well-educated Christians I know don't seem to be on average any more generous than the working-class and unemployed Christians with whom I worship in my neighborhood. Middle-class Christians are missing something more than know-how, it seems. Our problem is not so much that we don't know how to use our money for good as it is that we're not sure in this land of conspicuous consumption how to keep our money from using (and consuming) us.

To say it differently, I've got a feeling we need to be born again. Which is why I was glad also to find Jim Wallis's newest offering, *Rediscovering Values*. Christians in the politically progressive subculture have known Wallis for years as an organizer, rabble-rouser and preacher of peace and justice. Cofounder of the intentional Christian community Sojourners and editor of the magazine that bears the community's name (it was originally called the *Post-American*), Wallis spent three decades building a revivalist movement for social change before emerging after the 2002 midterm elections as the media's go-to commentator on issues of faith and politics. Wallis went on to write *God's Politics*, which became a *New York Times* best seller. Some have criticized Wallis for toning down his radical Christian commitments in order to have a hearing in America's public square. But while the language of *Rediscovering Values* is clearly aimed to include people of all faiths (and maybe even attract a few without faith), it reads like an altar call. Wallis casts the economic crisis as a come-to-Jesus moment.

Covering much of the same ground Hicks does about how we got into this mess, Wallis calls America's relationship to the market "idolatry," echoing the Hebrew prophets who insisted that false worship can lead only to death and destruction.

“The economic crisis is not just something that has happened *to us*, but has happened *with us*,” he bellows like a preacher coming to his closing flourish. What we need is conversion, Wallis insists, noting that such radical language isn’t just preacher talk: he hears economists saying the same thing. We don’t just need a more balanced diet, we need a recovery program, Wallis says. Like addicts at the end of their rope, we need a community and set of habits where positive choices and grace can meet.

Wallis is a good storyteller, and much of *Rediscovering Values* consists of stories meant to inspire people of faith to repent. Unlike the old-time revivalists, Wallis aims not so much to scare his listeners with the fires of hell as to attract them with the beauty of another way. From Muslim banks to Little League practice to church potluck suppers, Wallis highlights what’s possible when we turn from idolatry to the truth in our family, community and civic life. Like Hicks, he gets practical, offering a sort of economic 12-Step program (which has 20 steps). The practices are drawn from the stories Wallis tells throughout the book, but they invite readers to get to work figuring out what the practices mean in their own lives and communities.

Maybe more than anything else he has written, *Rediscovering Values* demonstrates what Wallis has learned from the life and ministry of Martin Luther King Jr. Like the great preacher for whom King was named, Wallis is not afraid to cry out against injustice, to be what King called the “conscience of the state.” While the fire in Wallis’s bones comes straight from the church and its scriptures, he is able to say, like King, that his dream for what we can be is firmly rooted in the American dream. In a pluralistic society, the good news calls us to justice for all people, even those who do not share our faith. So we look for common ground. We strive to learn from one another, and we hold up examples from the Muslim community when they are better at resisting usury than most of us.

In all of this, Wallis is a faithful student of King, who showed us that the road toward beloved community, however much we may share it with friends and neighbors of other faiths, is a way distinctly marked for Christians by the suffering of the cross. “Before the crown we wear,” King said, “there is the cross that we must bear.” He carried the cross all the way to Memphis, where he gave his life in a struggle for the dignity of garbage collectors. Maybe this is the value that we most need to rediscover in the present crisis: the defining mark of Christian love is our willingness to lay down our lives—and our money—for someone in need.